

Oklahoma Conservation Partnership Report

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VISION: Productive Lands Healthy Environments – MISSION: Helping People Help the Land

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A recent dust storm in Colorado, Oklahoma and Nebraska reminded many of the 1930s Dust Bowl. The Dust Bowl prompted the creation of our agency, then called the Soil Conservation Service, to protect our nation's soil. Though our name has changed, 79 years later soil conservation still remains a priority, as it helps producers increase their yields while ensuring the land becomes more resilient to erosion, drought and other natural resource threats. Many conservation practices, such as no-till, cover crops and windbreaks help decrease soil erosion. Furthermore, USDA studies show that soil erosion is reduced by 43 percent on lands that use conservation practices. Hugh Hammond Bennett, the first Chief of SCS, said "Take care of the land and the land will take care of you." This statement is truer today than ever, as NRCS, like other USDA agencies, works to address modern issues like climate change and develops methods for feeding an ever-growing population. To some, it is surprising to see dust storms like this in the modern age; it underscores the critical need for continued conservation on our nation's lands.

A wall of dust towers over Cimarron County during a dust storm on Jan. 9, demonstrating the persistent need for NRCS conservation assistance.



Photo by Cimarron County Conservation District.

ENGINEERING REVIEW

Autodesk University 2013

Andrea Lane, CET with the Design staff at the state office, recently had the opportunity to attend Autodesk University 2013. This annual 3 day conference and training held in Las Vegas, NV is attended by designers, engineers and innovators from all over the world. This year's conference boasted over 9,000 attendees from 74 countries. Besides offering 700 classes and labs, the conference also offered the opportunity to witness product demonstrations, visit with vendors, and network with other professionals. Andrea attended lectures and roundtable discussions on product features and industry trends. She also participated in labs working with new tools available in AutoCAD Civil 3D, which is a crucial program used by the Design staff daily.



American Society of Agricultural and Biological Engineers

Kevin Cook, Civil Engineer on the State Office Engineering Staff, recently spoke at the January 13, 2014, meeting of the Oklahoma State University Student Branch of the American Society of Agricultural and Biological Engineers. Kevin gave a short presentation on his duties, responsibilities and recent projects as an NRCS Engineer, and also provided the group with general information on the Oklahoma NRCS Engineering Staff and its structure.

The OSU Student Branch is part of the Oklahoma Section of ASABE. Brian Dillard, Project Engineer at the Stillwater Watershed Office, is currently serving as Chair of the Oklahoma Section, which will be holding its annual meeting on Friday, February 28, 2014, on the campus of Oklahoma State University.

OUTREACH REVIEW

NRCS Participated in Eastern Red Cedar on Indian Land Workshop

The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) was invited to participate by the Division of Natural Resources, Eastern Oklahoma Region, Bureau of Indian Affairs, in their Eastern Red Cedar on Indian Lands Workshop. The workshop was held at the Eastern Oklahoma Regional Office in Muskogee, Oklahoma on Wednesday, January 22, 2014. There were 16 Oklahoma Tribes in attendance. The purpose of the workshop was to inform the Oklahoma Tribes and Restricted Indian landowners of the Eastern Red Cedar encroachment, removal methods and commercial use. The focus of the workshop was to elevate the awareness of Eastern Red Cedar encroachment, fire danger, and impact on wildlife habitat, loss of grazing land and loss of water supply. The workshop will also include best methods to remove the Eastern Red Cedar.



Representing NRCS was Dr. Carol Crouch, State Tribal liaison. Dr. Crouch provided an overview of the NRCS Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP) and shared NRCS initiatives to address the encroachment of Eastern Red Cedar. Dr. Crouch was honored by Alan Fletcher, Cheyenne District 2 Legislator, of the Cheyenne Arapaho Tribes of Oklahoma, in cedar smudging ceremony. To the Cheyenne, the Eastern Red Cedar (*Juniperus virginia*), is used ceremonially. The cedar is burned while praying either aloud or silently. The prayers rise on the cedar smoke and are carried up to the Creator.

NRCS Hosted a Tribal Workshop and Consultation Meeting with Oklahoma Tribes

The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) partnered with the Oklahoma Tribal Conservation Advisory Council (OTCAC), the Citizen Potawatomi Nation (CPN) and the American Indian Science and Engineering Society (AISES) to host an informational workshop that provided the opportunity to explore ways to align the educational goals that AISES has for American Indian students with Tribal community needs and programs. Sarah EchoHawk, Chief Executive Officer, and Tribal member of the Pawnee Nation of Oklahoma, represented AISES at the workshop.



Sara Echo Hawk (AISES) and Carol Crouch

NRCS had the opportunity to consult with Tribes on their conservation needs, concerns and issues. Gary O'Neill, State Conservationist, provided an overview of NRCS technical assistance and programs available to Tribes. O'Neill also discussed the NRCS educational initiatives available for Tribes; such as soil health. Dr. Carol Crouch, NRCS State Tribal Liaison, shared with attendees the career opportunities that are available with NRCS in the field of STEM. The workshop was attended by 21 Oklahoma Tribes. NRCS has had a strong partnership with AISES for the past 11 years and this partnership has provided the opportunity to promote diversity in our workforce as we work together to promote the importance of careers in the field of STEM. The workshop provided a unique opportunity to consult with Tribes and strengthen our communication pathways as we develop strong relations that promote conservation that will lead to us working together to protect and preserve our lands for future generations.



Gary O'Neill, NRCS State Conservationist

ZONE 1 REVIEW

KAY COUNTY – Medford Field Service Center

On January 13th, the Newkirk Field Office welcomed Ryan McCloud as the Soil Conservationist. Ryan received a B.S. degree at Alabama A&M University in Agricultural Economics. Past employment has included research assistant for the Alabama Ag Land Grant Alliance and Sustainable Ag Research and Education Grant programs. Ryan has served the last two summers as a summer intern at the NRCS Perry Field Office and at the State Office in Stillwater.



LOGAN COUNTY – Guthrie Field Service Center

The Logan County Conservation District, the Guthrie NRCS office and the Logan County OSU Extension office presented an outreach meeting Jan. 28, 2014 at the Logan County Fairgrounds. Kathy Schmidt, District Manager of the LCCD and Haley Porter, Agriculture/4-H Extension Specialist of the OSU Extension office provided information on materials, equipment and programs that they have which can be used in helping Logan County landowners and producers. D'Ann Peterson, District Conservationist, NRCS gave power point presentations to promote the Conservation Stewardship Program and the Environmental Quality Incentives Program.



The Logan County Conservation District and the Guthrie NRCS office worked with their partners Langston University, the Logan County Farm Service Agency and Risk Management Agency to present an USDA Informational Program to landowners and producers at Langston University on Jan. 30, 2014. Kathy Schmidt, District Manager of the LCCD provided information on materials, equipment and programs that they have available. Chris Sala of the FSA discussed the steps and forms producers need to complete in order to get their land eligible for federal programs. LaShaun Smith of the RMA provided information on the process to insure lands. D'Ann Peterson, District Conservationist, NRCS gave power point presentations to promote the Conservation Stewardship Program and the Environmental Quality Incentives Program. Dr. Chongo Mundende talked about Langston University's summer internship opportunities. Dwight Guy with Langston University provided refreshments. There were approximately 15 LU students and producers who attended this meeting.

ZONE 1 Cont...**NOBLE COUNTY – Perry Field Service Center**

Pawnee, Payne and Noble County NRCS along with the Conservation Districts provided a Public Meeting to discuss the National Water Quality Initiative on Feb. 11, 2014. Oklahoma Conservation Commission, Shannon Phillips and Rural Water Association, Jeanne Anthony sponsored the meal. Twenty landowners around the Black Bear Creek, Panther Creek and Upper Camp Creek watershed areas learned about the benefits of soil testing in town and in the country, how to protect wells and surface water and about conservation practices that can be applied to benefit water quality and quantity.

**TEXAS COUNTY- Guymon Field Service Cen-**

The Guymon Field Office assisted the Oklahoma Panhandle Research and Extension center with hosting the National Conference on Cover Crops and Soil Health webinar on Feb. 18, 2014. The group of producers had a good discussion on cover crops after the webinar connection failed. Alan Messenger, DC, discussed the EQIP Statewide Cropland Soil Health Initiative.

ZONE 2 REVIEW**WASHINGTON COUNTY – Jay Field Service Center**

The Dewey NRCS Field Office manned a booth at the 2014 OSU Extension's KOMA (Kansas, Oklahoma, Missouri, and Arkansas) Beef Cattle Conference and Trade Show held on January 15 at the Washington County, Oklahoma. Approximately 85 area farmers and ranchers attended this event which ran from noon to 6:00pm. Our booth emphasized the Conservation Steward Ship Program (CSP). This resulted in applications being filed for CSP and EQIP during the conference. The program covered a multitude of topics relating to beef cattle production including: Alternative Feedstuffs, Heifer Implant Demonstration Results, Animal Welfare, Pasture Improvement (Weed and Brush Control) and Beef Cattle Economic Outlook.



James Dixon, District Conservationist- Manning the NRCS booth at the 2014 OSU - KOMA Beef Cattle Conference

Audience at the Oklahoma 2014 KOMA Beef Cattle Conference in Dewey, OK



ZONE 3 REVIEW

GARVIN COUNTY – Pauls Valley Field Service Center

The Garvin Conservation District held their annual Meet & Greet on December 16th at the Garvin County Fairgrounds. Steve Alspach, NRCS Assistant State Soil Scientist, spoke to over 70 people on soil health. Brandon Chandler, District Conservationist, covered NRCS programs, in particular, the Conservation Stewardship Program. Mike Lee, Garvin CED, gave a short presentation on FSA programs. Recent retiree, after 19 years on the Board, Jimmie Jarrell (pictured below in OSU orange), along with his wife Vickie, the Garvin Conservation District Board of Directors and Brandon Chandler, was presented the "Friend of Conservation" Award.



HARMON COUNTY – Hollis Field Service Center



Harmon County producers gathered at the Hollis Civic Center to attend a webcast of the National Cover Crop Meeting that was broadcast live from Omaha, NE. There were 12 people in attendance. Melissa Teague, NRCS DC from the Hollis Field office spoke more in depth on some of the topics from the live broadcast and discussed what practices would better work and be more beneficial in our area.

Tracy Wilson, PhD student from Oklahoma State University, discussed some items to consider in Cover Crop Management and informed meeting attendees of the benefits of cover crops in Oklahoma with data from Lahoma and Geary research plots.

Lastly, Jason Pace, southwest area ag economics specialist from OSU Extension Service wrapped up the meeting by discussing the economics of Cover Crops and informed producers of some of the upcoming program changes resulting from the new Farm Bill and how this will impact producers in Harmon County over the next five years.

The meeting was sponsored by Harmon County Conservation District, NRCS Hollis Field Office, and Harmon County Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service.

ZONE 3 Cont....**JACKSON COUNTY – Altus Field Service Center**

Southwest Oklahoma's Women in Agriculture and Small Business Conference was held January 31, 2014 at the Southwest Technology Center in Altus, OK.

The conference theme this year was "Growing Strong". About 125 ladies attended and had the pleasure of listening to several speakers with topics ranging from the importance of buying locally, healthy living, preventing identity theft, and self-defense. During breaks, those attending could visit booths set up by sponsors, local businesses, and vendors.

NRCS and the Jackson County Conservation District had a booth and distributed general conservation pamphlets and information about NRCS programs including CSP and EQIP.

**ZONE 4 REVIEW****Pontotoc County - Ada Field Service Center**

The Ada Field Office had an information booth at the 5th Annual 2014 Southeast Oklahoma Farm Show, Beef Expo & Swine show at the Pontotoc County Agriplex February 7-9. District Conservationist Clay Horton and Soil Conservationist Tony Wright talked to many landowners in the Southeast Oklahoma area about conservation programs and soil health. Three applications were taken the first day.



ZONE 4 Cont....

Eastern Oklahoma Ag Trade Show

The 8th Annual Eastern Oklahoma Ag Trade Show will be held again this year at the LeFlore County Fairgrounds west of Poteau, just off Highway 271, **Thursday, April 8, 2014**.

Speakers will be on hand to discuss a variety of agricultural topics. The doors will be open to the public at 8:30 am for visiting the exhibitor booths. The morning speaker sessions will begin at 9:00 am. Topics for the sessions include Poultry Education, Fire Ant Management, and Gardening 101.

Over 20 exhibitors are expected to be on hand at the event. Display booths will range from ag chemicals, farm equipment and supplies, metal and fencing supplies to feed and seed dealers, lending institutions, and government services. Everyone is invited and welcome to attend.

This event is being sponsored by the Latimer, LeFlore, and Sequoyah County and Talihina Conservation Districts, OSU Cooperative Extension Service, LeFlore County Cattlemen's Association, Oklahoma Tribal Conservation Advisory Council, Natural Resources Conservation Service, Farm Service Agency, Farm Credit, Kerr Center for Sustainable Agriculture, and OK Foods.



Ardmore, Marietta, and Madill Field Service Centers

The Carter, Love and Marshall County NRCS offices provided an outreach meeting in conjunction with OSU Extension during the annual **Spring Roundup**. Jim Williams, District Conservationist at Ardmore, discussed the programs NRCS has available. Warren Sanders at Marietta was in attendance and provided individual assistance to the 93 in attendance.



ZONE 4 Cont....**McCurtain County - Idabel Field Service Center**

Tree planting is in full swing in southern McCurtain County. Over 116,000 hardwood trees from various species are being planted on the newly established Missilidine-Harkey Tunnell WRP project located in the Grassy Slough drainage area. The 1,196.0 acre WRP project includes almost 500 acres of hardwood bottomland tree planting in conjunction with the dikes, water control structures, and native grass plantings already established. "This tree planting component will be the final step in completing the overall WRP conservation activities slated for the project. The Idabel Field Office working with different conservation partners including the Little River Conservation District has provided great oversight and management of the project" said Steve Barner, Oklahoma NRCS WRP Specialist. "Because of the scope and nature of this major WRP project ten different species of trees were obtained from both the Oklahoma and Arkansas Departments of Forestry. These trees planted today will play a major role in providing both food and cover for a wide variety of wildlife species for years to come" said John Mustain, Oklahoma NRCS State Forester.



(Pictured at left) Tree planting crew members prepare seedlings for planting. (Pictured at right) Idabel Soil Conservation Technician, Greg Allen (left) and Tim Jones WRP Assistant work closely with the tree planting crew to insure targeted tree quality and species count are met.